



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

peared. All three of us had spent many a long hour endeavoring to locate a nest of this species, which is not especially abundant here, and I was much gratified in finding this, our first one. The call note of this bird is very similar to that of the Sacramento Towhee, which it replaces in these altitudes.

On June 23 I collected my first nest of the Wright Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrighti*) with a set of four fresh eggs. I had located this nest previously on June 19, when it held a single egg. It was twelve feet up in a small Jeffrey pine (see fig. 9), against the trunk, and was made of grasses, grayish fibres and webs, and lined with rootlets, grasses and feathers. The female parent was taken with the set and is now number 19112 in the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

On June 24 a nest of the American Water Ouzel was noted with three fresh eggs, and a Pacific Nighthawk's with a set of two, slightly incubated.

The day following, my last afield, I climbed to a nest of the Cassin Purple Finch twenty-five feet up in a lodgepole pine, but found it to hold but two fresh eggs, although young of the year were now abundant. The day and trip fittingly closed with the finding of five eggs in a dainty little nest of the Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet, cleverly tucked away, almost out of sight, although but twelve feet up in a lodgepole pine.

*San Francisco, December 2, 1917.*

## THE SCARLET IBIS IN TEXAS\*

By R. A. SELL

WITH ONE PHOTO

THE EXACT status of the Scarlet Ibis (*Guara rubra*) in the avifauna of the Texas coast region has been a subject of speculation and good-natured controversy for at least twenty years. Much of this discussion has been among sportsmen, real estate agents, summer and winter resort boosters, and railway agents. While no data should be considered that does not emanate from a reliable source, it is about as easy to believe some noisy sportsman when he says that he has seen a Scarlet Ibis, as it is to believe a quasi-ornithologist who asserts that "the Scarlet Ibis is never to be seen on the Gulf Coast." Especially is this so when the former presents a mounted specimen and gives a vivid description of the circumstances under which he killed his bird.

Positive evidence is based upon something tangible. This may be a guess,

---

\*The writing of this article was stimulated by the comments of the Editor of *The Auk* (vol. xxxiv, pp. 360,373) in which he conjectured that the informal reference in a preceding CONDOR article (vol. xix, pp. 43-46) to an occurrence of the Scarlet Ibis in Texas was made without the realization by either the author of that article or by the editor of THE CONDOR that the species had not been previously authenticated as belonging to the avifauna of Texas. The Editor of *The Auk* was correct in his surmise, and all his remarks were quite to the point. Never-the-less it is a satisfaction all around now to be able to present the subject of the occurrence of the Scarlet Ibis in Texas in rather full detail, thanks to the industry of Mr. Sell. We would suggest that the *Auk* Editor might himself have been a bit more critical, in the case of the Colorado record of the "Harpy Eagle"!—EDITORS,

and even a good healthy lie is worthy of attention; but a negation is weak, uncertain, and at any time ready to collapse. It is the intention of this paper to review the mass of positive data and show what basis there has been for some of the current stories and rumors which are passed around much more frequently than the opinions of expert scientists.

The fact that Doctor Frank Chapman spent several weeks at Corpus Christi without seeing a living Scarlet Ibis wading in the shallows or gracefully flying across the blue waves, only indicates bad luck. And it was very unkind fate which permitted Mr. Nathaniel A. Francis to journey from Boston to Galveston especially to see curiosities of bird life, and then showed him the Scarlet Ibis only in the form of some stale, dust-covered, mummified skins; especially so, when a few weeks later a mere amateur was privileged to see one in the flesh,—or to nurse the illusion that he had seen one, which was just as satisfactory to him. Will the Scripture apply: "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"?

The task of getting real facts from a conglomeration of amateur data, hearsay testimony, unintentional exaggerations and deliberate prevarications is further complicated by the occasional mistaking of the Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) for the Scarlet Ibis (*Guara rubra*). Thus the bird that one Dr. T. J. Slataper of Houston killed in order to get feathers for his best girl, though reported as an Ibis, was undoubtedly a Spoonbill. This happened several years ago and while the Doctor is an enthusiastic lover of wild life and a conscientious exponent of bird-protection, he remains firm in the conviction that the act was fully justified and most gallant because "she asked him to get her the feathers"!

Professor H. P. Attwater of Houston is well known to readers of this magazine as a careful scientist and a tireless field-naturalist. By his lectures and his carefully prepared wild-life exhibits, he has done more to popularize useful knowledge of birds than it would seem possible for any one man to accomplish. His present summary of the case, which must be regarded as authoritative, is essentially as follows:

The Scarlet Ibis is not a resident of Texas; it is not a regular visitant, but according to reliable testimony, it has occurred at irregular intervals repeatedly along the coast. Of late years it is getting very scarce, and an occasional storm-driven bird is about all that can be vouched for. Many of the stories about visits of this bird can be referred to the Roseate Spoonbill. The conditions that favor bringing an Ibis to this locality are not understood.

Mr. W. N. Wilson, who has been connected with a sporting club at Rockport for several years, says: "The last time I saw a Scarlet Ibis, of whose identification I could be certain, was on the 20th of August, 1916. I was within fifty yards of it and could see its sharp bill and ibis pose. No one who has seen both Spoonbills and Ibises has any trouble in distinguishing them. In the fall of 1915 I think I saw one, but I cannot be sure. In the winter of 1912 some men from Illinois were out hunting and one of them brought in an Ibis. Though its feathers were badly torn, they were going to take it home and have it mounted. It is very seldom that the Ibis is seen near here (Rockport) but it is my opinion that there are more of them across on Bird Island and Mustang Island. No one knows where the mounted Ibis at the saloon came from. It was shipped here. It may have been prepared and mounted in Corpus Christi or Galveston or it may have come from New York. I know of several of the Spoonbills being

killed, but when it comes to going down on paper most men are afraid of the law."

Mr. J. B. Sternberg, who managed the sportsmans' club at Rockport, reports seeing the Scarlet Ibis on several occasions during the last eight years. "There was one specimen brought in. It had been killed by a broadside with heavy shot. It is hard to convince some men that it is better to let a bird go than to shoot it all to pieces." Mr. Sternberg thinks that the appearance of the Scarlet Ibis in the vicinity of Rockport is only accidental and that they usually drift in with the "East India highs"—the storms that come into the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea.

Mr. C. E. Bainbridge,—a taxidermist of recognized skill, a true sportsman, who understands the real value, economic and esthetic, of wild life, and former scientific assistant to a party of eminent scientists on a South American expedition,—says: "I saw the bird that attracted so much attention the day after the 1916 storm. While I was not close to it and could not be absolutely sure of an identification without having the bird in my hand I called it a Scarlet Ibis. Mr. Sell had named it before I saw it but I was ready to concur with his identification. I have seen many specimens of this bird and also of the Roseate Spoonbill and my judgment was that this individual was a stray Scarlet Ibis. On two occasions in the last seven years I believe I have seen the Scarlet Ibis along the shores of Corpus Christi Bay, though in both instances there was the possibility of my being mistaken. But on one occasion a man brought me a specimen to mount. It was fresh-killed and in good order. I had been away on a trip and my materials were not at hand so I prepared the bird as a skin and let him take it away with him. This specimen was an adult female. In the fall of 1913 two men brought a Scarlet Ibis to my house when I was away from home, and Mrs. Bainbridge, who is quite skillful in making bird-skins, prepared it for them. Her identification is certain for she could not be mistaken when she had the bird in her hand. These birds are very scarce and they will be scarcer yet if every man continues to take a shot at the first one that he sees."

Mr. J. C. Carlson of Robstown, Texas, has on two occasions seen birds supposed to be the Scarlet Ibis. He was in Corpus Christi when a fresh-killed Scarlet Ibis was being exhibited at a hardware store.

Mr. H. E. Lee of Corpus Christi reports seeing two of these birds, or the same bird twice, on the 19th of August, 1916, the day following the great storm. "We were walking along the west shore of the bay, a little less than a mile from the Beach hotel, when a very fine Scarlet Ibis, that had been standing near the edge of the water, raised its wings as if about to fly, but did not fly for several minutes. It raised its head high and pointed its bill towards the water, striking something of a pose. Several other people were coming along behind us, among them some ladies who were talking rather excitedly. The Ibis did not show signs of nervousness, but, without apparent preparation, shot into the air and, after taking several moments to get under way, flew across the bay in the direction of Flour Bluff. Later in the day I saw the same bird, or another one just like it, among the drifts that covered the higher points next to the railroad bridge. It stood almost still and we did not disturb it. I could not be mistaken, for the Scarlet Ibis is an old friend of mine. The first one that I remember of seeing was in the Field Museum at Chicago; the first live one was in a group of wading birds at a zoological park in New York City. There were three of these birds at the St. Louis Fair."

Mr. J. G. Holman of Weathersford, Oklahoma, a retired farmer and business man, who is spending his declining years with the rod and gun, was at Rockport during the 1916 storm and was with people who saw a Scarlet Ibis on a drift of debris. "It was a Scarlet Ibis all right and a very pretty one. This and the Spoonbill are the only red water birds that are ever found here. I have never killed either kind, but know they are not at all alike. The Spoonbill is more frequently seen than the Ibis. I have seen several of them. I saw three of them at one time but I never heard of any one seeing more than one Ibis at a time. In the winter of 1915 I saw a Scarlet Ibis standing in the shallow water below Aransas Pass. It was not fishing. It stood its ground until the boat passed. It

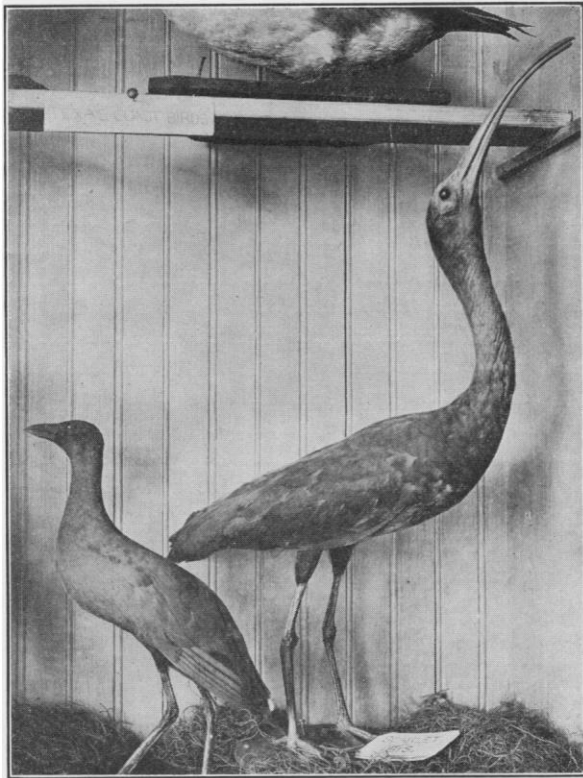


Fig 10. A TEXAS-TAKEN SPECIMEN (AT RIGHT) OF SCARLET IBIS; IN THE ATTWATER EXHIBIT IN THE CITY AUDITORIUM AT HOUSTON.

was in easy range of an ordinary gun. Two days afterwards I saw a Spoonbill and the day after that I saw another Spoonbill. They were along the shore not far from the pier on which I fished."

Mr. J. H. Jones of Garden City, Kansas, who has spent several winters at Corpus Christi and Rockport, reports seeing a Scarlet Ibis wading along the shore. This was in November, 1914. On another occasion he saw a fresh-killed specimen that was being displayed at a sporting goods store in Corpus Christi.

Dr. F. H. Russell of Dallas reports seeing a Scarlet Ibis on one of the narrow sand-spits below Galveston. The bird was standing still and permitted per-

sons to pass within thirty yards of it. As Dr. Russell is well versed in ornithology as well as in entomology, there is every reason to regard his identification as correct. Of course the question can always be raised as to any one's being able positively to identify this bird in the field.

On August 14, 1913, Mr. J. W. Woods, of Houston, who is familiar with the Spoonbill, saw, on the islands opposite Sylvan Beach, a red wading bird which he identified as a Scarlet Ibis. His identification, however, was made at a distance of 300 yards.

Such evidence as illustrated in the last three instances quoted could be extended, and there is much less reason for questioning it than when some noisy sport rents a gun and goes out for a day, coming back with a good story in lieu of game. One such man would do much more advertising than Mr. Jones, Dr. Russell or Mr. Woods. It is not surprising that discerning people in general listen to all reports of strange birds with disinterested indifference.

Mr. I. N. Heibner, of Houston, reports seeing two of these birds in the last five years. Four years ago his hunting partner killed a Scarlet Ibis. This specimen, a medium-sized male, was mounted and placed on exhibition at the Isch Ga Bibble Bar. When the business changed hands Mr. Max Brock got possession of the bird and took it to his home. Though the bird had been poorly mounted and was in a bad state of preservation, Mr. Brock refused to part with it.

No less than nine mounted specimens of the Scarlet Ibis can be accounted for: two in Houston, two in San Antonio, three in Galveston, one in Rockport and one in Corpus Christi. Of this number, the one (see fig. 10) in the Attwater exhibit at the City Auditorium, Houston, is the most available of the really authentic birds. This exhibit is open to the public every day. It was prepared with great care by Professor Attwater and sold to the Progressive League at a nominal price. Afterwards the city was induced to take over the exhibit and it was lodged at the City Hall; later it was removed to the City Auditorium. The other specimen in Houston seems to be quite as authentic, as regards capture in Texas.

One of the San Antonio specimens is at the Elks Club and while complete data can not be had, it seems to have been taken near Aransas Pass. The other one was at the Plaza Bar and there was no available data. "Bar-room ornithology" differs materially from scientific ornithology.

Of the three specimens at Galveston, one is in a curio shop and the other two are in bar rooms. At one time there was a taxidermist in Galveston who did a thriving business furnishing stuffed birds, especially ducks and geese, to sportsmen who wanted to take some trophies back home. A man could come there and spend a week at the hotel, loafing and playing cards, then buy some mounted birds or fish and get a good write-up in his home papers. It has not proven possible to get data for any of the Galveston birds.

There is no authentic data available for the specimen at Rockport. The one that is on display at a sporting goods store at Corpus Christi was probably killed on Corpus Christi Bay, but it has been on hand a long time and even the year in which it was killed cannot be definitely fixed.

It seems that to call a bird rare is equivalent to marking it for destruction. There is no doubt that in many cases the report that a Scarlet Ibis was to be seen along the coast, caused men to get their guns and go out to look for it. Even discussion such as the present, if widely circulated, may serve only to hasten extermination.

*Houston, Texas, January 5, 1918.*